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Telepresence

Designer Materials

Save the Best for Last

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During a transfer of authority, the outgoing and incoming units must ensure that the customers they support continue to receive a quality product throughout the transition.

When one unit replaces another in a theater of operations, the units must conduct a transfer of authority (TOA) to ensure that the incoming unit is integrated seamlessly into the battle command structure and is prepared to assume the mission. The TOA is essential in ensuring that mission continuity and customer support are not affected by the change of mission control.

The requirements of a typical TOA include not only assuming control of the mission but also completing an organization equipment inventory with subsequent property transactions, completing a number of base support and training requirements, and settling Soldiers into what will be their home away from home for the next year.

Regardless of planning, closely coordinated integration, and a positive relationship between units, TOAs can cause stress and anxiety for both the outgoing and incoming units' leaders and Soldiers. Consequently, units are most vulnerable to accidents and enemy threats during this period of transition. The TOA process is normally a 10-day process that encompasses not only handing over a mission set but also transferring an entire unit's property—an action that would take 30 to 45 days for an active unit to complete in garrison. The outgoing unit also must complete mandatory redeployment activities that include clearing various accounts, attending personnel briefings, packing, maintaining life support functions, completing personnel evaluations and awards, and arranging for the redeployment of personnel and equipment to home station. However, the most important mission for the outgoing unit is to "save the best for last": it must ensure that the transfer of the mission is seamless without a break in customer service.

Recently, the 541st Transportation Company (TC) (Petroleum, Oils, and Lubricants [POL]) from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, conducted a relief in place and TOA with its replacement unit, the 756th TC (POL) (-), a National Guard unit from Lancaster, California. The TOA process, which took place in Taji, Iraq, was a model of success.

The 541st and 756th completed their TOA with minimal stress or anxiety. The companies quickly and

professionally accomplished a seamless integration of outgoing and incoming units. The four basic principles used to accomplish this successful TOA were—

- Proactive communication. "Make the time."
- Established plan. "Stick to it."
- Immediate immersion. "Be fast and furious."
- Quality product to the end. "Save the best for last."

Proactive Communication

The leaders of the two companies began communicating 90 days before the 756th's projected movement into theater. Personnel assessments, including potential personnel and training strengths and weaknesses, were reviewed to prepare both units for the upcoming integration.

So that the 756th TC could adequately prepare for the upcoming mission, the leaders of the 541st provided the 756th with specific proficiencies that would be required in theater. Areas discussed included driving proficiency (measured in miles driven and the drivers' ability to operate both loaded and unloaded vehicles), weapons proficiency, and training that would be needed in order to serve commanders of combat logistics patrols (CLPs). Based on the 541st's input, the 756th TC expanded their predeployment training to include—

- Fifty thousand miles of driver training in a desert environment at Dona Ana, New Mexico.
- Crew-served weapons qualification for 39 percent of the unit's personnel.
- Vehicle familiarization while pulling tankers loaded with product.
- Convoy operations (for staff sergeants and above).

Established Plan

After an assessment by the 756th TC's commander, the 541st leaders developed and implemented a detailed training plan that incorporated—

- CLP trainup.
- Company headquarters and truckmaster operations.
- Life support integration (personnel, supply, and Soldier-care functions).

- Mandatory detail training (life support operations, force protection company, dining facility security, battalion and brigade support, and morale, welfare, and recreation crew).

- Maintenance –10 and –20 operations.
- Forward operating base (FOB) standing operating procedures (SOPs).

- Other specific battalion, brigade, and FOB policies and procedures.

Following a detailed training plan allowed both units to stay focused and provided little room for distractions. To ensure that the plan was synchronized, an advance party that included the 756th commander, operations officer, truckmaster, and supply sergeant arrived at the FOB 3 days before the main body of the company.

Immediate Immersion

The 541st provided on-the-spot assistance with instruction, unit SOP familiarization, and corrections (when needed) from the first day of arrival of the 756th. The 541st had moved out of the company barracks, work, and common areas before the 756th arrived. This set the conditions for the 756th to assume the mission and made the transition easier. Highlights of the “fast and furious” immersion included adjustment to the high operating tempo with reduced rest, leader planning and risk analysis, and constant direction and guidance by the 541st.

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Immersion was conducted in three phases. Phase I began with the 756th shadowing the 541st, or conducting a “right seat ride,” in all facets of company operations. The right-seat-ride concept started with daily operations, including leadership responsibilities, life support, maintenance, mandatory FOB details, and mission preparation and execution. The 756th’s convoy commanders were allowed to make mistakes on real missions, from mission preparation to mission execution; however, the 541st’s key leaders made immediate corrections. This phase lasted 3 days. Phase II was the “left seat ride,” in which the 756th assumed operations and the 541st observed. During this phase, 756th personnel overcame their anxiety and took over operations with on-the-spot consulting by dedicated 541st transition trainers. This phase lasted 4 days. Phase III was independent operations

with monitoring. The 756th began operating on its own, and the 541st personnel were available if needed for support. The 756th’s Soldiers were able to reinforce the three C’s, a concept developed by Colonel Gustave Perna, the commander of the 4th Sustainment Brigade, 3d Corps Support Command: confidence in themselves, confidence in their equipment, and confidence in their leaders. This phase lasted 3 days.

Quality Product to the End

Outgoing units often provide a mixture of personnel to conduct the relief in place and TOA training, but key leaders usually are absent from the training to prepare for redeployment. The 756th was fortunate that, under the “save the best for last” concept, the 541st provided a team of their key leaders, skilled operators, and gifted trainers for every aspect of the trainup. The same 541st personnel accompanied each mission element of the 756th TC on all CLPs during the right-seat-ride and left-seat-ride phases of the TOA. The 541st Soldiers served as coaches, observer-controllers, mentors, and consultants and, when necessary, rendered immediate on-the-spot corrections. This concept was carried throughout the full spectrum of the TOA. The 541st TC’s TOA training ensured that all 756th mission platoons were trained to the same standard. The 541st also was prepared to keep the training teams in place past the TOA (while the remainder of the unit redeployed) to ensure that the 756th was ready to assume the mission.

The success of the TOA was demonstrated when the 541st redeployed on time and the 756th stepped in to provide seamless customer support with the same level of professionalism that the 541st had provided. The 541st TC’s Soldiers can look back on their deployment as a total success because success is not measured by how you start but by how you finish. Their training plan to save the best for last—ensuring total mission success before departing—is a true testament to the professionalism of the unit.

ALOG

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